

Statement from the Park & Recreation Commission (PRC)

In response to the continuing requests to modify and expand the off-leash hours program in Arlington, the Park and Recreation Commission makes the following statement:

The current Off-Leash Rules and Regulations program originated in 2010 through a vote of Town Meeting. In order to establish the program, a number of community engagement meetings were held over multiple years. Compromises from residents both for and against off-leash hours in Arlington were required. The 2010 article to allow off-leash activity in the morning at select park sites under the jurisdiction of the PRC narrowly passed at Town Meeting, and in fact, a similar article to allow off-leash dog activity in town was narrowly defeated just the year before.

The success of the 2010 effort was, in part, thanks to the particular locations that were selected, as well as those that were omitted from the program, and the limitations and restrictions that were documented. At the time, there was much public debate regarding off-leash activity in our town's valued public spaces, and this program was determined to be the best compromise for our community. While not ideal for everyone, it was decided that morning hours in specific locations would provide opportunity and minimize conflict. In addition, the dedicated fenced Thorndike Off-leash Recreation Area (OLRA aka dog park) was created to serve the need that exists beyond the morning hours. The ability to create additional dedicated fenced off-leash spaces exists in the by-law that was enacted.

Many factors contributed to the hours, locations and rules - environmental, public safety, limited recreation properties and established recreation uses, but underlying it all was respect for those on both sides of the issue. We acknowledged and continue to acknowledge that how people recreate is a personal choice that helps to create and enhance our sense of community - with dogs or without, with or without children or for children or individuals alone. We strive to make Arlington's recreational opportunities varied and inclusive for all ages and abilities. It requires compromises and funding and can be a challenge in a densely populated community with diverse interests, finite open spaces and limited budgets.

During much further consideration of recent requests from dog owners and park users, no substantial change in circumstances was brought to our attention that would merit a change in policy. The PRC has voted to stand by the original community decision and has decided not to expand off-leash activity. We will continue to evaluate opportunities to create dedicated fenced off-leash areas.